

May 9, 1969

Mr. Albert J. Lipson  
Chief Consultant to the Assembly  
California Legislature  
Assembly General Research Committee  
Room 320, State Capitol  
Sacramento, California

Dear Mr. Lipson:

I am pleased to note your letter of April 14 and its information about the proposed Science Advisory Council. The merits of such an organization are so self-evident that I need hardly make much further comment. I should think that you would want about ten people on it, and I would hope that a tradition would soon emerge according to which the Council would be regularly consulted on the problems of the State and the legislation that may be required to meet them.

I would caution, however, that with the best of intentions, such a group will nevertheless be stretched very thin for the necessary range of technical knowledge and social awareness. I would hope, therefore, that the Council function as the focus of a much broader activity along the following lines. The Council should have a staff office in Sacramento. This office should request that each of the institutions of higher learning and significant research within the State name a specific individual to function as liaison between the legislative Science Advisory Council and their own local technical community. They would be the focus of a great deal of necessary communication between the respective groups. The designated liaison men would be charged with inculcating a spirit of sensitive awareness and responsibility for thinking about the problems of the State within their own community, can expect to receive considerable necessary information from the legislature and other branches of state government via the Science Advisory Council, and would be charged to communicate this to their own colleagues. In turn, the liaison men would communicate any recommendations that they receive from their own communities to the Science Advisory Council for further consideration and presentation to the legislature.

A definite further advantage of such a scheme would be the involvement of student energies in a constructive way to the analysis and delineation of important contemporary problems, and through channels by which they can hope to have a positive impact on the welfare of the State and of themselves as citizens.

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It would be desirable to think of some additional funding that could help to support such an operation, but I am sure it could be started without explicitly supporting the program with State funds. The scheme would also help to insure that the Advisory Council perceived its responsibility to a very broad technical community, as well as to the State as a whole, in the formulation of its recommendations. Otherwise a group as small as this is likely to be accused, and perhaps even sometimes fairly, of parochialism or representation of special interests.

A further step that could facilitate communication on these issues of State interest would be the establishment of a new publication, perhaps as an appendix to the legislative record, but through whatever means would enable wide dissemination of articles and critical discussions of relevant subject matter. Needless to say, many of the issues that require scientific expert knowledge are controversial and should be ventilated as widely as possible before legislative action is taken.

Thank you for the opportunity to express my reactions to these proposals.

Sincerely yours,

Joshua Lederberg  
Professor of Genetics